

Bulletin Blue Ribbons 2015

This was an exciting year! Our fiction list is one of our most diverse in many ways— characters, genres, audience age—which is a challenge when it comes to discussing relative merits but a delight in its implications. This year we had a plethora of titles formatted as graphic novels, so we pulled them out into a separate section to illuminate them better. We also had some passionate discussion about genre, which may be reflected in next year's approach to the Blue Ribbons: watch this space. The list can be found on our website at <http://bccb.lis.illinois.edu>, as will a downloadable and printer friendly version of the list in trifold form.

Deborah Stevenson, Editor

FICTION:

Barnhill, Kelly. *The Witch's Boy*. Algonquin, 2014. Gr. 5-7 (January)
Grieving the loss of his twin brother, Ned joins up with Aine, a thief's daughter, to save two warring nations in this otherworldly novel that examines desperation and loneliness with a gently optimistic view.

Brockenbrough, Martha. *The Game of Love and Death*. Levine/Scholastic. Gr. 8-10 (July/Aug)

This sweeping, epic tale of personified Love and Death examines risk, loss, and the value of human connection through a romance on which high stakes have been placed.

Crowder, Melanie. *Andacity*. Philomel. Gr. 8-12 (March)

In graceful, affecting poetry, this free-verse novel follows the life of Clara Lemlich, a key figure in the unionization of garment workers in the early twentieth century.

English, Karen. *Skateboard Party*; illus. by Laura Freeman. Clarion, 2014. Gr. 3-5 (February)

Richard's schoolwork procrastination threatens to prevent him from attending his friend's party in this warm, funny novel that captures the not always flawless logic of kids and the trouble they can get themselves into while trying to stay out of trouble.

Hardinge, Frances. *Cuckoo Song*. Amulet/Abrams. Gr. 7-10 (June)

Hardinge is a masterful writer, and in her hands the shift from horror tale to an impactful family tale of regret, forgiveness, and loss is seamlessly handled.

Lai Thanh Hà. *Listen, Slowly*. Harper/HarperCollins. Gr. 6-9 (March)

California girl Mia is annoyed when she's forced to travel to Vietnam to be with her grandmother, but new experiences (some good, some not so good) give Mia a new perspective in this endearing look at the way family roots often shape our present

Larbaestier, Justine. *Razorburst*. Soho Teen. Gr. 9-12 (June)

This sharp-edged, sometimes gory, always enthralling look at the 1930s Australian underworld combines realism and supernatural elements in a sexy, frightening, and haunting concoction.

Nickerson, Sara. *The Secrets of Blueberries, Brothers, Moose and Me*. Dutton. Gr. 4-6 (September)

The title says it all, really, but those secrets offer both comfort and conflict for Missy as she teeters towards the beginning of adolescence.

Reynolds, Jason. *The Boy in the Black Suit*. Atheneum. Gr. 7-10 (February)

Matt finds comfort after his mother's death by working at the local funeral home in this powerful exploration of the varied and sometimes peculiar ways we choose to grieve.

Rundell, Katherine. *The Wolf Wilder*. Simon. Gr. 5-8 (September)

The narrative voice is a surprisingly effective combination of wit and pathos as it guides readers through this folkloric tale that follows one headstrong girl and her wolves as she tries to find her missing mother during Russia's 1917 February Revolution.

Watson, Renée. *This Side of Home*. Bloomsbury. Gr. 7-10 (March)

Watson effectively manages character and situation to reflect the experience of African-American twins Nikki and Maya as they negotiate personal identity and desires while their gentrifying neighborhood brings issues of racial injustice and privilege to the fore.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *Gone Crazy in Alabama*. Amistad/HarperCollins. Gr. 5-8 (May)

This final volume in a historical fiction trilogy that perfectly captures the messy joy of family will be warmly welcomed by fans and will be a brilliant and irresistible introduction for newbies.

GRAPHIC NOVELS:

Brown, Don. *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans*; written and illus. by Don Brown. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Gr. 5-9 (October)

Brown's spare text relays the facts of the natural disaster and the human error that compounded its terrible effects, but it's the dramatic illustrations that convey the true desperation felt by the residents of New Orleans in the wake of the storm.

Camper, Cathy. *Lowriders in Space*; illus. by Raul the Third. Chronicle, 2014. Gr. 5-9 (January)

The catchy, slightly fantastical story about animal friends trying to make the perfect lowrider becomes memorable gold when paired with unbelievably intricate colored-pen drawings.

Simpson, Dana. *Unicorn on a Roll: Another Phoebe and Her Unicorn Adventure*; written and illus. by Dana Simpson. Andrews McMeel. \$9.99 Gr. 3-5 (June)

Phoebe and Marigold (an egocentric unicorn) have returned for another round of best friendship, witty takes on the world, and some minor school problems. *Calvin and Hobbes* fans, take note!

Stevenson, Noelle. *Nimona*; written and illus. by Nicole Stevenson. HarperTeen/ HarperCollins. Gr. 7-10 (July/Aug)

This impeccable graphic novel offers poignancy, mystery, adventure, superheroes, shapeshifting, and stunning illustrations, not to mention one of the most memorable and appealing protagonists around in brash young Nimona.

THE BULLETIN

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**Bulletin
Blue
Ribbons**

**The best in childrens' literature,
chosen by the *Bulletin* staff.**

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PICTURE BOOKS:

Antony, Steve. *Please, Mr. Panda*; written and illus. by Steve Antony. Scholastic. 4-6 yrs (March)

Mr. Panda just wants animals to show some manners before he'll share; listeners who have their own strong sense of justice will appreciate this logic while also reveling in the black and white animals that set off the vibrant colors of the pastries.

Barnett, Mac. *The Skunk*; illus. by Patrick McDonnell. Roaring Brook. Gr. 2-4 (July/August)

Mid-century-style illustrations and a formal writing style are the perfect choices for this unusual tale of a man and skunk, and some evolving questions about just who is following whom.

Bond, Rebecca. *Out of the Woods: A True Story of an Unforgettable Event*; written and illus. by Rebecca Bond. Ferguson/Farrar. 6-9 yrs (September)

In this true story, a young boy's unusual life at a hotel in the Canadian woods takes a turn for the dramatic when a forest fire drives everyone, including the forest's animal inhabitants, into the lake for a miraculous shared moment.

Dubuc, Marianne. *Mr. Postmouse's Rounds*; written and illus. by Marianne Dubuc; tr. from the French by Yvette Ghione. Kids Can. 4-6 yrs (October)

Fans of Richard Scarry's work will happily pore over the small details in the cutaway views of that reveal the goings-on in the houses of various animals visited by Mr. Postmouse.

Escoffier, Michael. *Take Away the A: An Alphabeast of a Book*; illus. by Kris Di Giacomo. Enchanted Lion, 2014. 6-9 yrs (January)

Teachers and parents will love the language arts curricular possibilities of this book that plays with the subtraction of key letters from words; the sly comedy will keep kids just as interested.

Kennedy, Anne Vittur. *Ragweed's Farm Dog Handbook*; written and illus. by Anne Vittur Kennedy. Candlewick. 5-8 yrs (September)

Viewers don't have canines to appreciate the belly-busting humor of this delightful guidebook from a dog that gets an A for effort . . . and a treat.

Knudsen, Michelle. *Marilyn's Monster*; illus. by Matt Phelan. Candlewick. 5-7 yrs (May)

Monsters aside, this is one of the sweetest (but not overly so), cleverest, kindest books about belonging and the benefits of a best friend, beautifully partnered with Phelan's expressive, homey, imaginative illustrations.

Portis, Antoinette. *Wait*; written and illus. by Antoinette Portis. Porter/Roaring Brook. 3-6 yrs (October)

The simple clarity of Portis' mixed-media art speaks volumes in this picture book that employs only three words to tell the tale of a little boy's desire to explore the world at his own speed.

Thompson, Laurie Ann. *My Dog Is the Best*; illus. by Paul Schmid. Farrar. 3-6 yrs (September)

Thick, penciled lines and soft colors bring the cozy and the clever in this little kid's sweet, funny testimony to the wonders of his dozing dog.

NONFICTION:

Blumenthal, Karen. *Tommy: The Gun that Changed America*. Roaring Brook. Gr. 7-10 (July/Aug)

Descriptions of infamous gangsters and crimes are balanced with a detailed look at the inventor of the now notorious Tommy gun and his misgivings about what he created.

Christensen, Bonnie. *Elvis: The Story of the Rock and Roll King*; written and illus. by Bonnie Christensen. Ottaviano/Holt. 5-8 yrs (July/Aug)

This affectionately written picture-book biography traces Presley's early life, when he was an awkward, persistent hopeful with no inkling of his future superstardom.

Hoose, Phillip. *The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club*. Farrar. Gr. 7-10 (July/Aug)

Movie-ready, edge-of-your-seat narration describes how teens managed to strike back against Hitler, even if their country of Denmark was officially reluctant to do so.

Jarrow, Gail. *Fatal Fever: Tracking Down Typhoid Mary*; illus. with photographs. Calkins Creek. Gr. 5-9 (April)

This compelling work traces the full story of the notorious typhoid fever carrier, using science to explain how deadly a carrier could be while still offering compassion to the woman whose life was forcibly curtailed.

Jenkins, Steve. *How to Swallow a Pig*; by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page; illus. by Steve Jenkins. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Gr. 3-6 (October)

This inventive approach to natural history wittily instructs audiences, in several simple, cleanly illustrated steps, how to perform crucial everyday behaviors of various animals.

Lowery, Lynda Blackmon. *Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March*; as told to Elspeth Leacock and Susan Buckley; illus. by PJ Loughran and with photographs. Dial. Gr. 4-9 (February)

Lowery's eyewitness narration, accented with photographs, provides an accessible and compelling account of the Selma march and will get kids thinking about their own roles in current events.

Pizzoli, Greg. *Tricky Vic: The Impossibly True Story of the Man Who Sold the Eiffel Tower*; written and illus. by Greg Pizzoli. Viking. Gr. 5-9 (April)

The exploits of conman Robert Miller, who hustled Paris police officers and Chicago gangsters in the early twentieth century, are followed in this humorous illustrated chronicle that depicts our anti-hero as a bowler-hatted pixelated fingerprint.

Say, Allen. *The Inker's Shadow*; written and illus. by Allen Say. Scholastic. Gr. 8-12 (December)

This followup to the author/illustrator's *Drawing from Memory* recounts his experience coming from Japan to live on his own in the U.S. as a teen not long after World War II; low-key yet telling narration combines effectively with copious illustrations to provide a picture of his artistic growth as well as his personal life.

Sheinkin, Steve. *Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*. Roaring Brook. Gr. 7-12 (November)

If a book was ever to show students how history repeats itself, it is this meticulously researched, high-stakes thriller that follows the man who exposed the lies behind the Vietnam War and became both a hero and a villain to the American public.

Tonatiuh, Duncan. *Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras*; written and illus. by Duncan Tonatiuh and with photographs. Abrams. Gr. 2-5 (October)

The playful skeletons associated with the Day of the Dead are fleshed out in this compelling look at Jose Guadalupe Posada, the nineteenth-century artist who made famous the comic cast of skeletons from the holiday's tradition.